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PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

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**FAO strategic priorities for food safety within the FAO Strategic
Framework 2022-31**

Queries on the substantive content of this document may be addressed to:

Mr Markus Lipp
Senior Food Safety Officer, Food Systems and Food Safety Division (ESF)
Tel: +39 06570 53283
Email: markus.lipp@fao.org

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This document sets out the FAO Strategic Priorities for Food Safety within the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, which was refined based on comments and guidance received from the 28th Session of the Committee on Agriculture (COAG).
- In developing the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, the Organization outlined Programme Priority Areas (PPAs), a number of which are centred around or include important food safety activities [in particular, but not limited to, PPA *better nutrition* “Safe food for everyone” (BN3), PPA *better nutrition* “Transparent markets and trade” (BN5), and PPA *better production* “One Health” (BP3)]. Further to the World Health Assembly (WHA) resolution 73.5 to strengthen efforts on food safety,¹ FAO collaborated with the World Health Organization (WHO) to ensure that their respective food safety strategies are aligned and mutually supportive.
- The Strategic Priorities for Food Safety are articulated around four Strategic Outcomes that result from an iterative consultative process led by FAO with its Members and international partner organizations, including, notably WHO. FAO and WHO have been working for many decades through a longstanding partnership to implement the Food Standards Programme (Codex Alimentarius), provide scientific advice, strengthen the capacities of FAO Members for a better participation in standard-setting processes of Codex Alimentarius, and reinforce their national food control systems. During the development of the *FAO Strategic Priorities for Food Safety within the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31* and the *WHO Global Food Safety Strategy*, FAO and WHO maintained a standing and rigorous information sharing and discussion mechanism. Both organizations have committed to plan the development of a joint framework for implementation, following the endorsement of the respective strategic directions.
- FAO expects the *Strategic Priorities for Food Safety* to act as an instrument that will spur investments and secure adequate human and financial resources for FAO to successfully implement its food safety programme and to provide international guidance, policy and advocacy for policymakers. These Strategic Priorities encourage a more consistent integration of food safety in the development of sustainable and inclusive agrifood systems, food security and nutrition policies, and agriculture development strategies.

GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

- The Programme Committee is invited to review the content of the document and provide guidance on this matter as deemed appropriate.

Draft Advice

The Committee:

- **recognized that food safety provides key contributions to One Health, transparent markets and trade, the development of sustainable and inclusive agrifood systems, food security and nutrition, and constitutes an essential prerequisite to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;**

¹ World Health Organization (WHO). 2020. *Seventy-Third World Health Assembly: Geneva, 18-19 May (de minimis) and 9-14 November (resumed) 2020: resolutions and decisions, annexes*.
<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/345951>

- welcomed the **FAO Strategic Priorities for Food Safety**, their strong alignment within the **FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31** and **FAO's** close coordination to ensure mutual compatibility and complementary with **WHO's** food safety strategies;
- appreciated the commitment of both **FAO** and **WHO** to develop a joint implementation plan leveraging the complementarity of the **FAO Food Safety Priorities** and **WHO Food Safety Strategy**;
- invited **FAO** to continue to provide demand-driven policy and technical support to **Members** in their efforts to improve food safety, and to ensure the availability of resources for such support;
- encouraged **Members** to partner and invest in food safety at national, regional and global level, through continuous improvement of their national food control systems, data collection and analysis, and active participation in international food safety governance, as a key contribution to **One Health**, safe food trade, enabling the sustainable development of inclusive agrifood systems and food security; and
- recommended the Council to review and endorse the *FAO Strategic Priorities for Food Safety within the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31* at its 171st Session.

I. Introduction

1. At the 2020 World Food Safety Day, FAO Director-General QU Dongyu stated that “food security and food safety are basic rights of human beings.”² The United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) seek to further the global goals of ending hunger, achieving food security and providing healthy food to all by addressing the need to significantly transform agrifood systems towards greater sustainability and resilience.^{3,4}

2. Food safety is defined as “the assurance that food will not cause harm to the consumer when it is prepared and/or eaten according to its intended use.”⁵ Unsafe food impinges on the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security and undercuts efforts to guarantee health and wellbeing. Safe food is also a prerequisite for achieving healthy diets, increasing market access and economic development, as well as overall food security, defined as “access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life” for all.

3. When and where food is not safe, to meet the SDGs will not be feasible, and many SDGs will remain out of reach, including eliminating hunger (SDG2) and achieving health and wellbeing (SDG3). Unsafe food causes an estimated 600 million cases of food-borne diseases (FBDs) every year, as well as 420 000 annual deaths. Children under the age of five account for 143 000 of those fatalities.⁶ Human illnesses due to unsafe food are estimated to cause yearly productivity losses equating to USD 95 billion for low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).⁷

4. Beyond the risks that they present to public health, food safety incidents also threaten to reduce consumer confidence not only in specific foods, which can result in unnecessary waste, contributing to significant additional greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, but also in the food safety authorities responsible for creating and enforcing food safety rules.

5. The Strategic Priorities have been developed to ensure that food is safe to eat, whoever and wherever a person may be. They seek to promote inclusive agrifood system policies and programmes built on the foundational knowledge that the nutritional, cultural and psychological benefits of food can only be enjoyed when food is safe. Food safety is simply a *conditio sine qua non* for the fulfilment of FAO’s mandate to achieve comprehensive food security.

6. The FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 explicitly lists “Safe food for everyone” (BN3) as one of the Programme Priority Areas (PPAs). Reflecting the foundational nature of food safety, the need for food to be safe underlines the work in numerous PPAs, and most notably in “One Health” (BP3), and “Transparent markets and trade” (BN5) (see Figure 1). The current Strategic Priorities reflect the intersectoral nature of food safety and mark an effort both to capture and to integrate food safety across all sectors of the agrifood system. In light of this, greater emphasis should be placed on the enhancement of food safety capacities of public-private actors at normative level, including science and innovation, and value chain actors – women and men involved at operational level – and on raising greater awareness along the food chain.

² FAO. 2020. *Food safety is a shared responsibility* [online]. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/right-to-food/resources/resources-detail/en/c/1279369/>

³ United Nations. 2015. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

⁴ Agrifood system: “The agrifood system covers the journey of food from farm to table: when it is grown, fished, harvested, processed, packaged, transported, distributed, traded, bought, prepared, eaten, and disposed of. The agrifood system also includes the livelihoods of the people who work in the system as well as the activities, investments and choices that play a part in producing food and agricultural products. In the FAO Constitution, the term “agriculture” and its derivatives include fisheries, marine products, forestry and primary forestry products”. From: 166th FAO Council Report (CL 166/REP, <http://www.fao.org/3/nf693en/nf693en.pdf>)

⁵ Codex Alimentarius. 1969. General Principles of Food Hygiene (CXC 1-1969). <https://bit.ly/3ul24sp>

⁶ World Health Organization. 2015. *WHO Estimates of the Global Burden of Foodborne Diseases*. <https://bit.ly/3AOZ1tn>

⁷ Jaffee, Steven; Henson, Spencer; Unnevehr, Laurian; Grace, Delia; and Cassou, Emilie Cassou. 2019. *The Safe Food Imperative: Accelerating Progress in Low- and Middle-Income Countries*. Agriculture and Food Series. Washington, DC, World Bank. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/9781464813450.pdf>

7. The Strategic Priorities stem from FAO's important achievements in food safety, including those undertaken within the 2014 *FAO Food Safety Strategy*, and made possible thanks to its collaboration with partners.

Figure 1: *FAO Strategic Priorities for Food Safety, within the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, in support of SDGs.*



8. The Strategic Priorities focus on building stronger and more coordinated global, national and regional food safety and quality governance. A more solid scientific evidence base for stronger decision-making is also key, as are legal and institutional frameworks supporting effective and up-to-date national food control mechanisms. Coordination across all actors, including women and men primary producers and the informal sector of the agrifood system, will manage more effectively safety risks at all stages of the food production process.

9. The Strategic Priorities are based on an agrifood systems approach, in which food safety takes on a central role in the development of MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems. Food safety practices, together with the provision of infrastructure and resources, must be introduced early in the process to improve resource efficiency and to reduce waste and environmental contamination by operators along the food chain.

10. The Strategic Priorities connect FAO's normative and programmatic work. The normative work includes the provision of scientific advice in support to the Codex Alimentarius standard setting process, and developing food safety guidance materials for FAO Members. The programmatic work supports initiatives by FAO Members to strengthen official food control systems and food safety and quality management along the food chain, as well as enhancing intersectoral coordination.

11. The Strategic Priorities support the transformation of the agrifood systems to meet the challenge of making safe and diverse food accessible to a global population of ten billion people, 70 percent of whom are expected to be living in cities by 2050.⁸ This will require foresight and food safety assessment of new developments in agriculture and food production. The sooner we recognize and address the potential impacts of global trends and developments on food safety, the more likely countries will be able to prepare for and manage food safety risks and challenges. For continued and improved compliance with food safety and quality requirements for international food trade, the Strategic Priorities call for enhancing knowledge and capacities and investing in infrastructure across the board. A systems-thinking approach that considers all the interconnected parts, and how they influence each other, can help to identify how best to target these enhancements and investments. A failure to invest may limit market access and income generation.

12. The Strategic Priorities take into account the potential impact that food safety regulations can have on the more vulnerable actors in the agrifood system, including small scale producers, rural poor and marginalized actors such as women, youth and Indigenous Peoples. Along with its partners, FAO will continue to provide tailored support for food safety awareness of consumers and capacity development for market access by food business operators, ensuring that efforts to modernize the agrifood system do not exclude segments of the population or contribute to growing inequality.

13. FAO, with its broad network of partnerships, and its expertise in agriculture and the conversion of agricultural products into food, is well positioned to support its Members and relevant stakeholders in addressing current and future food safety challenges. Its technical expertise spans the entire agrifood system, from the production of crops to animal feed, livestock, fisheries, aquaculture and forest products, and the processing, storage, packaging, transportation, preparation and disposal activities associated with their consumption. The scope of its objectives is broad, including food security, food safety and quality, and nutrition.

14. FAO's competence in food and agriculture places it in a unique position to provide the support that its stakeholders need in the food safety area, whether that be policy, legal or governance matters, or operational management and capacity development issues. Its expertise and experience covers the whole food chain; as a key knowledge building and knowledge sharing organization, FAO provides neutral dialogue and action platforms for all stakeholders.

15. FAO has developed tools and platforms to strengthen Members' food control systems and has provided targeted support to Members on production and economic aspects as well as social, gender and environmental considerations of food. This support includes tools to target specific value chain

⁸ FAO. 2019. *FAO Framework for the Urban Food Agenda*. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca3151en>

actors to ensure inclusiveness and gender equality. With offices across the globe, FAO has a vast network that connects global institutions and other actors to local stakeholders.

16. FAO also manages long-standing relationships with governments and other stakeholders on food safety matters. In its decades working in the area of food safety, the Organization has fostered knowledge and collaboration, and partnered with a wide array of actors. A major international partner in these endeavours has been WHO, with whom FAO has worked to establish and provide scientific advice, to support Members' participation in Codex Alimentarius for developing international food safety guidance and standards, and to help Members strengthen their national food control systems. Both organizations bring their own unique perspectives and skillsets to the process based on their mandates. A standing information sharing and discussion mechanism was set up with WHO, to ensure that the *Strategic Priorities for Food Safety* and the *WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety 2022-2030* are aligned, mutually supportive and complementary. The two organizations have committed to plan the development of a joint framework for implementation following the endorsement of the respective strategic directions with special attention to ensure suitable synergies are created.

II. Mission, Vision and Strategic Outcomes

17. The *Strategic Priorities for Food Safety* reflects FAO's work and expertise and stems from an articulated vision and mission as described below.

- i. *Vision*: Safe food for all people at all times.
- ii. *Mission*: To support Members in continuing to improve food safety at all levels by providing scientific advice and strengthening their food safety capacities for MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems.

18. This Section describes how the Strategic Priorities are organized into four Strategic Outcomes, and illustrates the considerations and foundational narratives that led to their development and to the articulation of the respective Strategic Actions.

19. The four Strategic Outcomes of the *Strategic Priorities for Food Safety* are:

- i. Strategic Outcome 1 – Intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder engagement in intersectoral coordination of food safety governance is reinforced at all levels;
- ii. Strategic Outcome 2 – Sound scientific advice and evidence are provided as the foundation for food safety decision-making;
- iii. Strategic Outcome 3 – National food control systems are further strengthened and are continuously improved;
- iv. Strategic Outcome 4 – Public and private stakeholder collaboration is promoted to ensure food safety management and controls throughout agrifood systems.

Note: the order in which the Strategic Outcomes appear is by no means reflective of any ranking. They are interconnected and interdependent, thus equally necessary to achieve the vision and mission (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: the four Strategic Outcomes supporting the *FAO Strategic Priorities for Food Safety within the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31*.



20. Several novel elements are included in the Outcomes:
- i. aligning the priorities to the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 and Members' ambition for food safety support in the context of achieving agrifood systems that are MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable;
 - ii. adopting a One Health approach, whereby multiple sectors work together to tackle health threats, to support food safety developments and to include food safety considerations when making decisions related to food security and sustainability;

- iii. providing food safety support at all levels, from global to national and local levels, and advocating for better intersectoral coordination and integrated multisectoral approaches to securing food safety;
- iv. contributing to the establishment of innovative and broader partnerships between FAO and public and private entities, to better leverage and mobilize the available expertise and resources needed to achieve these Outcomes;
- v. pursuing new approaches to better assist specific food business operators and stakeholders in LMICs, such as women and men smallholder farmers, family farmers, young farmers and entrepreneurs, micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), which lack adequate resources and capacities to meet food safety requirements for public health and market access;
- vi. expanding the breadth and depth of foresight to proactively identify emerging issues that might pose food safety risks or offer opportunities, to allow for timely decision-making;
- vii. strengthening assistance to FAO Members concerning food safety data generation and information management, including providing tools for data sharing and analysis; and
- viii. supporting FAO Members in fostering inclusion in policy design and implementation to ensure food safety efforts benefit women, youth, rural poor, small scale producers, Indigenous Peoples, and other excluded groups by addressing their specific vulnerabilities and constraints in adopting new measures, accessing new policies or adopting new technologies that contribute to food safety.

A. Strategic Outcome 1: Intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder engagement in intersectoral coordination of food safety governance is reinforced at all levels

21. As FAO Members work to transform agrifood systems, it is important that food safety remains a priority and its principles and objectives are integrated across the whole food chain. Food safety principles and standards should be respected when making operational, governance, and financial decisions at national, regional and international levels.
22. FAO plays a crucial role in this endeavour by providing tailored support to Members and other stakeholders related to guidance and technical support on various aspects of food safety, including normative, governance, science, and policy matters.
23. A prominent element is the FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme, which, through the Codex Alimentarius Commission,⁹ develops evidence-, science- and risk-based food standards. These standards and texts provide guidance to stakeholders and Members meant to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in food trade. FAO and WHO provide the scientific basis for the deliberations of the Commission through the joint FAO/WHO Scientific Advice Programme, typically in the form of expert meeting reports, guidance documents and tools.
24. As one of the three international standard-setting organizations in the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS), along with the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) governing body, the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM), the Codex Alimentarius Commission plays an important role in the context of international food trade. Its guidance is used as a reference to establish national standards, to minimize the regulatory burdens in cross-border trade, and to promote global harmonization.
25. FAO will continue providing support and actively contributing to intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder engagement in intersectoral coordination of food safety governance. It will enhance its work with the SPS standard-setting organizations, as well as the One Health High Level Expert Panel (OHHLEP) and other initiatives advocating for One Health approaches.
26. The goal of fostering food safety governance and applying food safety norms globally and at all subsidiary levels can only be achieved with FAO Members' support and engagement in the

⁹ <http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/home/en/>

process. This is especially true when the overall goal is improving public health and trade and in the context of an evolving agrifood system. FAO will continue to encourage and support Members and stakeholders to actively participate in the global food safety governance discussions and activities.

27. The Strategic Actions (A1) to achieve Strategic Outcome 1 are:

A1.1 To continue supporting collaboration between the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its Secretariat to advance the food safety standards-setting process.

Encouraging greater participation of FAO Members, especially developing countries and those in economic transition, and stakeholders in the Codex work will be key in achieving this goal. FAO will continue to reach out to diverse stakeholders and broaden the support towards international standards development. It will consider new ways of working, including virtual tools for communication, information sharing, collaborations and meetings. It will continue advocating for support to the Codex Trust Fund and for the use of Codex standards as the basis for harmonizing and developing national regulatory frameworks.

A1.2 To promote greater coordination and dialogue in line with the One Health approach and One Health Action Plan¹⁰.

FAO will facilitate dialogues and activities taking into account the mandates, responsibilities and accountabilities of each stakeholder, including regional and international organizations. It will promote cooperation across multiple sectors, including food safety, public health, agriculture, animal and plant health, economy, education, trade, environment, and general food law at all relevant national and international levels and in synergy with the One Health Action Plan. Specific initiatives will include coordinating activities and establishing technical multistakeholder networks around current and emerging food safety issues. FAO will encourage Members to continue to establish food safety standards, taking into close consideration the uptake capacities of all stakeholders (including for example, smallholders, women and men, and MSMEs), thus enhancing food safety governance. The Organization will further provide integrated and coherent assistance to countries in regulating and monitoring the use of antimicrobials and in preventing and minimizing the development and further spread of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) within the agrifood system, to humans and in the environment, and limit its effect on the safety and integrity of the food chain. These actions will be carried out according to the FAO Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance 2021-2025,¹¹ which was developed further to Conference Resolution 4/2015 on AMR,¹² to combat antimicrobial resistance globally.

A1.3 To foster communication on food safety and risks.

This will entail support to policy makers and other relevant stakeholders to better convey the impact of food safety on society, specifically on health and livelihoods, leveraging, as appropriate, the One Health Action Plan.

Events such as the World Food Safety Day can help raise awareness on how food safety underpins food security and trade, and how it influences the economy and private industries. FAO will continue to increase awareness and advocacy, including among private sector actors such as MSMEs, farmers' and producers' associations, consumers and consumer organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations. This will also help to secure investments towards improved food safety, including through capacity development, infrastructure, data management, and partnerships. In addition, FAO will continue to produce guidance and support to Members on risk communication matters.

¹⁰ Available as draft: <https://www.woah.org/app/uploads/2022/04/oh-jpa-14-march-22.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.fao.org/3/cb5545en/cb5545en.pdf>

¹² <https://www.fao.org/3/MO153E/MO153E01.htm#Resolution4>

B. Strategic Outcome 2: Sound scientific advice and evidence are provided as the foundation for food safety decision-making

28. Over the last several decades, the FAO/WHO Scientific Advice Programme for food safety has been the authoritative global point of reference for evidence-based scientific information on food safety. By gathering a wide range of expert advice, resources and tools, it has established principles and methods to assess various types of hazards. This programme has supported Codex and FAO Members in informing their food safety related decisions.

29. To enable the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, it is essential that the programme continues to provide timely and sound advice through its standing expert panels which include the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA), the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Meetings on Microbiological Risk Assessment (JEMRA), and the Joint FAO/WHO Meeting on Pesticide Residues (JMPR), as well as ad hoc expert meetings.

30. Food safety science and food-related technologies are constantly evolving and new food safety issues continue to emerge. FAO takes into account the potential impacts of ongoing changes and trends in agrifood systems with implications for food safety. It also uses forward-looking approaches such as foresight and horizon scanning to proactively identify emerging issues and to assess their food safety implications. These approaches can help to evaluate trends and drivers, as well as issues of regulatory significance, and quickly alert decision-makers and policymakers so they can make informed and appropriate decisions. In this regard, for FAO to continue to provide cutting-edge and useful information in support of Members' and Codex's time-sensitive decisions, it must continue to update and revise the methods and approaches underpinning risk assessment and risk-based advice.

31. Across various science areas, the ability and practice of assessing both risks as well as benefits continues to deserve attention. For this to happen, good data on food safety need to be in place. This is especially true as managing and making decisions on food safety issues increasingly involve ensuring due consideration of food safety within specific food security contexts and factors related to the sustainability and resilience of agrifood systems. This raises the importance of producing sex-disaggregated data when pertinent for understanding and addressing gender and social inequalities as underlying causes of value chain inefficiencies and that may constrain the uptake of food safety measures.

32. FAO must continue to support Members in generating, interpreting and maintaining their own good quality data according to a set of standard approaches and processes. It can also provide relevant alternative data where country data may be missing. Attaining good data must also result from coordinated activity between FAO Members, stakeholders and partners. Furthermore, making the results of the analysis of data accessible within a secure and protected framework is important as it benefits both Members and the international food safety community, and allows for more efficient decision-making processes, both regionally and internationally.

33. Gathering trustworthy and solid information on food safety risks and communicating that information in a timely manner to the relevant authorities is key for advancing food safety goals. However, so is clear messaging that avoids ambiguity and potential misinterpretation. It is important to continue to harness capacities and tools to achieve effective risk communication on food safety matters and to readily counteract miscommunication.

34. The Strategic (A2) Actions to achieve Strategic Outcome 2 are:

A2.1 To maintain and improve the leading-edge scientific advice provided by the joint FAO/WHO food safety expert panels, mainly JECFA, JEMRA, and JMPR.

This will ensure that the FAO/WHO Food Safety Scientific Advice Programme will continue to be a key global point of reference for the development of national and international standards, as well as for risk management and other decision-making processes on current and emerging food safety issues.

A2.2 To continuously improve, tailor, and update the science-, evidence- and risk-based approaches, as well as the methodologies and skills to provide authoritative scientific advice to Codex, FAO Members and other UN agencies.

This concerns various types of food safety hazards, including chemical, microbiological, and physical hazards, as well as associated risk assessment capacities. There are a number of examples of approaches that are becoming increasingly relevant in these areas. For example, in chemical risk assessments, non-animal testing-based approaches and combined exposure to multiple chemicals are some of the areas that are being increasingly explored. A further example, regarding microbiological risk assessments, is the modelling of data generated by gene-based technologies and big-data approaches that are under rapid development.

- A2.3 To foster an understanding and appreciation of the importance of scientific advice and guidance on food safety matters among FAO Members and food safety stakeholders.*

Raising awareness among Members and relevant stakeholders on the importance of sharing data and information, for others to conduct good risk assessments, is key in this endeavour. In this context, FAO will engage new experts in FAO/WHO panels to better analyse food safety data, for instance from across the relevant One Health science areas, and to gain a better understanding of current and future food safety risks.

- A2.4 To better identify emerging food safety issues associated with new trends and drivers, by applying foresight and horizon scanning approaches, and to combine these with appropriate science- and evidence-based risk assessments to enable more informed decisions and more effective policies.*

- A2.5 To maintain and refine the key international food safety databases – like those of JECFA – that contain global information and advice, and platforms such as the FAO GM Foods Platform.¹³ These will help to coordinate and disseminate data and information across FAO Members.*

C. Strategic Outcome 3: National food control systems are further strengthened and are continuously improved.

35. National food control systems have the dual objective of protecting the health of consumers and enabling fair practices in food trade, both domestically and internationally. To remain relevant in the dynamic and multifaceted context of food safety, national food control systems should develop situational awareness, and be proactive and flexible enough to change and improve over time.¹⁴

36. To avoid mainly relying on reactive responses to food safety incidents, it is essential for FAO Members to build the capacity to recognize potential hazards ahead of time, and to assess and manage the associated risks, thus building national food control systems built on anticipation, prevention and mitigation.

37. There are a number of other areas in existing national food control systems that could benefit from additional support from FAO. Communication and coordination among different competent authorities involved in food control must be strengthened. Legal and regulatory frameworks need to be updated and consolidated, and more resources must be mobilized to implement basic functions such as inspection and enforcement. Overall, these systems lack stable and predictable funding to update the skills of their personnel, to build robust programmes, to sustain operational costs, and to invest in essential analytical instruments. More efforts need to be made to build capacities to plan, monitor, evaluate and further strengthen food control programmes in a way that can create a continuous cycle of improvement. In addition, greater investment in capacity and resources are necessary for FAO Members to use the risk analysis paradigm to guide food control programmes. This is crucial especially in contexts where resources are limited to begin with.

38. The Codex Alimentarius standards, guidance and other resources, which were developed following the latest science-, evidence- and risk-based approaches, offer FAO Members a basis to continuously improve national food control systems and to develop resources tailored to national or

¹³ <https://www.fao.org/food/food-safety-quality/gm-foods-platform/en/>

¹⁴ FAO. 2013. *Principles and Guidelines for National Food Control Systems*. CXG 82-2013. <https://tinyurl.com/ufw3dz3v>

regional food safety governance. Members should be able to identify where capacity development is most needed, depending on the scale of domestic food enterprises and the ability of food business operators to deliver consistently safe food in line with formal requirements and practices. In doing so, competent authorities could consider integrating both regulatory and non-regulatory approaches to tackle food safety issues.

39. Digital and other technological modernizations are necessary to improve food controls. However, to be able to use them effectively FAO Members need to invest in human resources, infrastructure, as well as data and privacy protection mechanisms.

40. The Strategic Actions (A3) to achieve Strategic Outcome 3 are:

A3.1 To provide technical support to FAO Members to evaluate their national food control systems, identify needs and design integrated capacity development programmes.

Members can benefit from using the FAO/WHO food control system assessment tool¹⁵ to conduct the evaluation. This will help them monitor improvements over time and ultimately increase accountability.

A3.2 To support FAO Members and relevant stakeholders, particularly in developing and transition economy countries, where requested, to participate more actively in Codex Alimentarius work.

This will bring in a diversity of perspectives, making the Codex Alimentarius Commission's work more inclusive, and the resulting standards and guidance more globally applicable. FAO Members need to develop capacities at local and national level to adopt Codex standards, codes of practice, guidance and recommendations, and to harmonize national or regional regulations using the relevant Codex texts. This also involves developing national capacities to engage effectively with the Commission, by establishing the proper working processes and communication mechanisms at national level (and regional, where appropriate), and by strengthening technical expertise.

A3.3 To support FAO Members in developing and updating their food safety standards, legal frameworks and government policies, as well as operational level procedures and guidelines.

This will provide the necessary basis to strengthen their science, evidence and risk-based food controls including inspection and monitoring programmes, analytical services, early warning mechanisms and emergency responses. Efforts must be made to raise awareness among policymakers to encourage greater coordination between competent authorities across different sectors on food safety matters. With the support of its partners, FAO will also assist Members and relevant stakeholders to strengthen capacities with regard to food control infrastructure and services.

A3.4 To help FAO Members generate relevant food safety data that reflects their national context/situation.

Good national data is a critical element of effective national food control systems. Such data should reflect the food safety status in terms of the hazards and risks at national or other relevant level. This would help FAO Members make decisions on governance, specifically on the levels of acceptable risks and the necessary steps to mitigate them. It would also help in tracking regulatory implementation or operational food safety performance, surveillance approaches and help to identify research and innovation needs related to food safety. It would also support Members' risk communication efforts. In addition, good quality national data is the bedrock for FAO and WHO's scientific Advice Programme supporting the development of international food standards.

A3.5 To support FAO Members and relevant stakeholders to embrace relevant technological

¹⁵ FAO and WHO. 2019. *Food Control System Assessment Tool: Introduction and glossary*. Food safety and quality series No. 7/1. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/publications/card/en/c/CA5334EN>

developments, including digital technologies, in food control and food safety management, for the following purposes:

- i. generating and analysing data to develop tailored monitoring programmes of potential hazards along the food chain, and to disseminate advice on risks management;
- ii. streamlining communication and operations between public and private entities on food safety issues. This includes supporting organizations' digital transformation initiatives, improving the quality and accuracy of data and information exchanges, and expanding virtual exchanges for certifications, audits and other interactions;
- iii. embedding food safety management and food control mechanisms into e-commerce platforms and other novel marketing channels; and
- iv. establishing effective approaches and strengthening the preparedness, response capacity, and management of food safety emergencies, including early detection and warning of potential food safety incidents and hazards.

D. Strategic Outcome 4: Public and private stakeholder collaboration is promoted to ensure food safety management and controls throughout agrifood systems.

41. The only way to ensure that food is safe for consumption is if everyone involved in the whole food chain is aware of and actively works to maintain the safety of food. While the responsibility for food safety policymaking and enforcement ultimately lies with the relevant competent authorities, public organizations and private entities should collaborate to advance science, innovate food production and processing, and advance effective operational food safety management.

42. In addition, food safety must be achieved in a proactive way. Dealing with food safety in a reactive way, i.e. handling food safety incidents as they arise, causes health disruptions, waste, mistrust in foods and in food authorities, and is costly for everyone involved. It is crucial that food safety be managed in accordance with preventative principles and thus be included in the design and implementation of overarching food-related programmes.

43. Partnering with governments, public organizations, academia, and the private sector allows FAO to access new tools and approaches and to expand the resources it provides to its Members in support of their food safety work.¹⁶ This is especially true in key technical areas including digital transformation, data management and dissemination, and cyber security.

44. Resources must be dedicated to build the capacities and infrastructure necessary to ensure that the public and private actors involved in the food system collaborate and implement control measures in accordance with internationally recognized food safety standards. Experiences and lessons learned by FAO Members and across sectors should be documented and shared to support overall improvement in prevention of food safety issues.

45. The Strategic Actions (A4) to achieve Strategic Outcome 4 are:

A4.1 To support both governments and food chain actors starting from primary production and including associated industries, academia, consumers and other stakeholders, in adopting gender responsive and inclusive programmes of preventative food safety control and management.

This will enable the development of inclusive and integrated approaches to prevent and tackle complex food safety challenges affecting trade and public health, and the development of food safety interventions both for routine circumstances and for food chains affected by emergencies and crises.

A4.2 To provide the tools and resources for stakeholders to make informed choices and adopt food

¹⁶ FAO envisages that private sector engagements will bring strategic partnerships, scale up collective multistakeholder efforts, and bring country-owned and country-led innovative solutions to help FAO Members to achieve the SDGs, ultimately maximizing the positive impact for the beneficiaries that the Organization supports. The FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2021-2025 provides a detailed account of the engagement criteria. For details see here: <https://www.fao.org/connect-private-sector/en/>

safety interventions that are specific to their countries' priorities, safety risks and their constituents' differentiated needs.

This will be done by striking the right balance between existing ways of operating and the adoption of new technologies, while ensuring that agrifood system transformations do not compromise food safety.

A4.3 To ensure that lessons learned from national- and regional-level food safety control programmes and initiatives can inform global level normative work and strengthen dialogues on food safety.

A4.4 To support initiatives aiming to create training programmes and curricula that better reflect the complexity of food safety and the need for collaborations across disciplines.

46. FAO will continue to engage with academia to adapt food safety curricula, ensuring that disciplines such as data and knowledge management, risk assessment and risk communication are included.

III. Implementation and monitoring

E. Delivery of the FAO Strategic Priorities for Food Safety within the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31

47. FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 seeks to support the 2030 Agenda through the transformation to MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems for **better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life**, leaving no one behind. Food safety is a critical prerequisite to ensure that all humans can enjoy a better life and better nutrition, and unsafe products not only make consumers ill, they add substantially to food loss and waste as they cannot be consumed by humans. Thus food safety considerations are at the core of all successful agrifood systems transformations and constitute a critical element of One Health.

48. As food safety is relevant to, and cuts across, many FAO functions and units, it risks fragmentation, and to some extent loss of consistency across sectors. To prevent this, the Food Systems and Food Safety Division (ESF) will provide overall technical guidance and support to the other FAO units and Decentralized Offices. ESF has the capacity to ensure that food safety practices developed for specific countries, regions or sectors are consistent with global standards, that they result from the lessons learned in other countries and contexts, and that they embed the latest technical or policy developments.

49. Implementing the Strategic Priorities will take into account a number of organization-wide strategies and guidelines. In its engagement with the private sector, FAO will apply the Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2021-2025.¹⁷ This strategy emphasizes, among other things, the need for FAO to maintain its neutrality and independence when working with private partners, and to maximize local-level impact especially with smallholder farmers in the spirit of leaving no one behind and doing no harm, in line with FAO's Extreme Poverty Framework.¹⁸ Following FAO's Framework for Provision of Scientific Advice on Food Safety and Nutrition,¹⁹ FAO will honour the principles of integrity, fairness and objectivity in the provision of evidence-based information to its Members. In this process, and in full respect of privacy and data licensing agreements and principles,^{20,21} making data accessible to FAO and its Members will be key to achieving the goals of the Food Safety Scientific Advice Programme.

50. FAO will engage in new key technical areas in the context of advancing food control systems and transforming agrifood systems. The Organization aims to provide up-to-date advice and capacity

¹⁷ <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb3352en>

¹⁸ <https://www.fao.org/3/ca4811en/ca4811en.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/i7494en/>

²⁰ FAO. *Privacy Policy for Use of FAO Applications* [online]. <https://www.fao.org/contact-us/privacy-policy/en/>

²¹ FAOLEX Database Open Data [online]. <https://www.fao.org/faolex/opendata/en/> and FAO. 2020. *Open Data Licensing for Statistical Databases*. <https://www.fao.org/3/ca7570en/ca7570en.pdf>

development support to its Members and stakeholders on generating and sharing data efficiently, as well as in adopting innovative data analysis and interpretation tools.. To do so, FAO will improve the proficiency of its personnel and attract new personnel and experts in these key technical areas. FAO will partner with experts to enhance its own capacity to master the opportunities posed by digital transformations, and to be able to address the trade-offs and welcome the opportunities and tools that they offer.

51. In this regard, it is worth emphasizing the values of the strong partnership that FAO and WHO have developed over the past several decades in the area of food safety. The unique capabilities that they both bring to the table make for a valuable and fruitful partnership. Both organizations offer forward-looking global food safety programmes that allow them to continue working together to advance food safety and to strengthen their joint support to Members. FAO and WHO have committed to plan the development of a joint framework for implementation, following the endorsement of the respective strategic directions.

52. Many of FAO's partners are UN agencies. Besides WHO, these include the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). FAO has also partnered with other international organizations such as WOAHA, the World Bank (WB), and WTO (which hosts the Standards and Trade Development Facility – STDF),²² as well as with NGOs and private sector entities.

53. It is also important to highlight a number of other specific and salient activities that FAO has conducted in collaboration with its partners:

- i. FAO supports the operationalization of the One Health approach *inter-alia* through the One Health Action Plan, which aims to protect human, animal, plant and environmental health. It does so in collaboration with several other UN agencies including WHO and UNEP, as well as with WOAHA. At regional and national level, the Organization works with the agencies, financial institutions and NGOs mentioned above, and with national food safety authorities;²³
- ii. FAO has developed and currently implements its Action Plan on AMR. The Organization works closely with WHO and WOAHA, as well as with the private sector, academia, civil society organizations, and financial institutions to carry out the Action Plan;
- iii. FAO and WHO jointly manage the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN), a voluntary network which counts on the participation of over 700 representatives of national food safety authorities from a total of 186 Members. INFOSAN facilitates the rapid exchange of information during food safety incidents in international food trade.²⁴

54. FAO has also been active in awareness-raising initiatives. With the support of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and WHO, FAO advocated for the adoption of a World Food Safety Day to raise awareness on the importance of food safety and to mobilize engagement and sustained investment.²⁵

55. FAO intends to build and reinforce its existing partnerships to advance food safety objectives. In the framework of the *Strategic Priorities for Food Safety*, the Organization aims to leverage strategic partnerships with public and private entities with the aim of expanding human resources and

²² FAO is a founding partner of STDF together with WHO, WTO, WOAHA and WB; IPPC and Codex are technical partners in the STDF Working Group.

²³ FAO. One Health [online]. <http://www.fao.org/one-health/en/>

²⁴ FAO. Food safety and quality – EMPRES food safety [online]. <http://www.fao.org/food-safety/food-control-systems/empres-food-safety/en/>

²⁵ Codex Alimentarius – World Food Safety Day 2021 [online]. <http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/world-food-safety-day/en/>

increasing investments. Many of the new areas that FAO intends to further expand through these partnerships are included in the four Strategic Priorities.

F. Investments for delivering the Strategic Priorities

56. Ensuring that safe food is “available for everyone all the time”, as stated in the Vision, requires efforts and investments of public and private entities. Greater investments need to be dedicated to further strengthening national food control systems. These cover many areas of responsibility of governments, including food safety governance and standard setting, policy, law and regulations, monitoring and surveillance, inspection and enforcement, crisis preparedness and management, risk management, risk assessment and risk communication.

57. Further investments are required in FAO’s attempts to engage stakeholders involved in food safety at global and local level. These include policymakers, regulatory authorities, food industry and associated businesses, consumer organizations and individual consumers that may benefit from receiving more timely information on food safety matters, especially to make better, more balanced decisions.

58. In addition, investments are needed to make sure that food chain operations integrate food safety principles, especially as agrifood systems become MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable, while maintaining supply chain integrity. Innovative tools and technologies, for example related to the development of new foods and nutrient sources, will require investments to ensure food safety management and controls. Finally, training and educating future food safety professionals is also key in advancing food safety and deserves greater investments. Training efforts must be funded so the workforce can acquire adequate knowledge and skills to be able to respond to the challenges and opportunities that food safety and the transformation of agrifood systems pose.

59. In the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, the Organization identified the themes of gender, youth, and inclusion as cross-cutting and important issues, which need to be taken into account across all of FAO’s programmatic work, so as to promote a more systematic mainstreaming and operationalization of these issues across all of FAO’s work, and thus will be considered while implementing the Strategic Actions.

60. Achieving safe food for everyone requires a gender sensitive approach, addressing restrictive cultural norms that prevent rural women to access capacity building and extension services; as well as finance, technologies, and markets, when they need to respond to food safety requirements and operationalize food safety measures. Often women operate in informal value chains, thus special measures are needed to ensure that informal retailers, food vendors and caterers have access to adequate infrastructure, such as potable water and waste disposal facilities, safe storage as well as safe and hygienic accommodations, so that they can ensure food safety and dispose of food waste with minimal environmental damage.

61. In respect of youth, the Rural Youth Action Plan (RYAP), fully embedded in FAO’s Medium-Term Plan (MTP) has been designed with the goal of contributing to the realization of the SDGs by equally empowering rural young women and men, protecting children and other excluded youth groups, as present and future holders of our ecosystems and food systems while being key actors to improve food safety at large.

62. FAO’s efforts to improve food safety will ensure the inclusion of all people, especially the excluded, marginalized, and those living in situations of vulnerability, as both producers and consumers. The introduction of new food safety policies can present challenges for small-scale producers, while adoption of technologies risks exacerbating inequalities due to unequal access to and capacity to adopt them. It is key that consumer awareness and education efforts account for vulnerabilities and reach all people.

63. Other areas where greater investments are needed fall under the responsibility of national and international stakeholders. These include food production, processing, distribution and trade, issue and incident management, traceability and recall approaches, and information technologies (IT) infrastructure and technologies.

G. Monitoring of and reporting on the implementation of the FAO Strategic Priorities for Food Safety within the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31

64. The progress and delivery of the Strategic Priorities will be monitored and reported following the overall mechanisms and cycles of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31. The planning and implementation of the Strategic Priorities will also be carried out in a manner to best achieve the goals of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31.

65. The implementation of the Strategic Priorities, or of parts thereof, will be planned in accordance with priorities, timelines, capacities, and resources developed between FAO and its partners. Risks concerning FAO's ability to deliver the proposed Strategic Outcomes within the set timelines will be identified throughout the process and, where possible, mitigation measures will be put in place. Such risks may result from the very nature of working with multiple partners and having to depend on external conditions for outcomes and underlying actions to advance accordingly.

66. As part of the planning process, indicators for the delivery of Strategic Outcomes and activities will be established. These indicators will include the definition of baselines, targets and metrics, and will be developed to be consistent with the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 goals, specifically the programmatic areas under PPA "Safe food for everyone" (BN3), and other relevant PPAs (BN5 and BP3). Indicators, for example, could measure relevant qualitative or quantitative aspects of delivery or achievement. Quantitative indicators could be particularly useful to assess elements of FAO's support and input along the process. Qualitative indicators could provide insight on the value and impact of FAO's work.

67. Action plans will be developed for the established work, with timelines and milestones set in accordance with results-based management priorities. The deadlines for particular aspects or areas of delivery may be broken down in phases as appropriate for management and reporting purposes, with indicators and action plans defined in greater detail for the delivery in the shorter-term rather than for the longer-term.

68. Monitoring the progress of the Strategic Outcomes and Actions will rely on gathering the necessary data and on introducing adaptations required to improve the achievement of targets. To use resources for data gathering and evaluation more effectively, synergies will be sought with the monitoring efforts of other relevant programmes, such as those operating in the context of the Codex Strategic Plan 2020-2025,²⁶ the Draft WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety 2022-2030,²⁷ One Health,²⁸ and AMR.²⁹

69. Reporting of progress will essentially follow the FAO Strategic Framework reporting cycle and mechanisms, while effective use will be also made of the abovementioned existing communication and reporting channels.

70. In monitoring, evaluating and reporting the implementation and progression of the Strategic Priorities, FAO will ascertain the best approaches to integrate information and data to reflect in the most comprehensive manner the Strategic Outcomes for Members and other stakeholders.

²⁶ FAO and WHO. 2019. *Codex Strategic Plan 2020-2025*. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/3/ca5645en/CA5645EN.pdf>.

²⁷ WHO 2021. *Draft WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety 2022-2030*. <https://bit.ly/3HcXnUW>

²⁸ FAO. One Health [online]. <http://www.fao.org/one-health/en/>

²⁹ FAO and WHO and WOA. 2019. *Monitoring and evaluation of the global action plan on antimicrobial resistance: framework and recommended indicators*. <https://bit.ly/3HgtKC>